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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 000198

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SA AND PM; SECDEF FOR DSCA AND ISA; CINCPAC FOR J454 AND POLAD

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SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: NEED FOR EDA CUTTER

1. (U) Classified by DCM W. Lewis Amselem, Reasons 1.5 (b, d)

2. (SBU) THE COUNTRY TEAM STRONGLY SUPPORTS PROVISION OF A 210' EDA CUTTER TO THE SL NAVY.

3. (SBU) AS EXTENSIVE EMBASSY REPORTING HAS DISCUSSED, THE POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, MILITARY AND SECURITY ENVIRONMENT IN SRI LANKA HAS UNDERGONE DRAMATIC CHANGES SINCE THE 5 DECEMBER 2001 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS WHICH BROUGHT A NEW GOVERNMENT TO POWER. THE GSL AND TAMIL TIGERS (LTTE) HAVE SIGNED A CEASEFIRE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING AS A PRELUDE TO TALKS (O/A MAY 27) AIMED AT ENDING NEARLY TWO DECADES OF BRUTAL CIVIL WAR. FEELINGS OF OPTIMISM AND HOPE HAVE SWEEPED OVER THIS TROUBLED ISLAND. THE FIGHTING HAS STOPPED, AND THE MANY AND ONEROUS SECURITY PROCEDURES THAT AFFECTED EVERY DAY LIFE HAVE DISSIPATED: LONG CLOSED ROADS HAVE REOPENED; POLICE AND MILITARY CHECKPOINTS HAVE SHUT DOWN; AND DRACONIAN RESTRICTIONS ON FISHING AND OTHER MARITIME ACTIVITIES HAVE BEGUN TO DISAPPEAR.

4. (SBU) AS OUR REPORTING ALSO HAS STRESSED, HOWEVER, THE GSL WANTS TO ENTER THIS DELICATE PERIOD WITH 'A WARM HEART, BUT A COOL HEAD.' THE GSL'S FOE IS ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST RUTHLESS AND SOPHISTICATED TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS. AS OUR PUBLIC STATEMENTS AND OTHER INFORMATION HAVE MADE CLEAR, WE CONTINUE TO SEE LTTE EFFORTS AT RESUPPLY AND OTHER ACTIVITIES THAT SEEM TO INDICATE, AT A MINIMUM, A LACK OF TOTAL RELIANCE ON PEACE TALKS AS A MEANS TO RESOLVE THE DISPUTE THAT HAS TORN APART SRI LANKA.

5. (C) THE SRI LANKAN NAVY NEEDS HELP. IT HAS REPEATEDLY SHOWN A WILLINGNESS TO CLOSE WITH THE LTTE'S OCEAN-GOING FORCE, THE SEA TIGERS. THE NAVY'S WILL TO FIGHT, HOWEVER, HAS EXCEEDED THEIR ABILITY TO FIGHT EFFECTIVELY. THE SEA TIGERS HAVE INFLICTED SERIOUS CASUALTIES ON THE NAVY, INCLUDING THROUGH THE USE OF DEVASTATING SUICIDE CRAFT. OPEN PRESS IN SRI LANKA POINTS TO PAST ATTACKS BY LTTE SUICIDE BOATS AS THE INSPIRATION FOR THE ATTACK ON THE USS COLE. TIGER MARITIME SUPPLY ARGUABLY REMAINS ONE OF, IF NOT THE MOST, SERIOUS CHALLENGES FACED BY THE GSL IN BRINGING TO A SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSION THE RECENTLY LAUNCHED PEACE PROCESS. AN ASSESSMENT BY A TEAM FROM THE US PACIFIC COMMAND HEADQUARTERS IN SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER OF 2002 INDICATED THAT MARITIME INTERDICTION OF THE LTTE'S RESUPPLY CAPABILITY WAS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS NEEDING TO BE ADDRESSED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF SRI LANKA. THE NAVY SIMPLY CANNOT DO THE JOB WITH ITS CURRENT FLEET -- AND THE TIGERS KNOW IT AND SIMPLY DO NOT TAKE THE NAVY VERY SERIOUSLY. BEEFING UP THE ABILITY TO INTERDICT AND DETER TIGER SUPPLIES WOULD MAKE A MAJOR CONTRIBUTION TO THE PEACE TALKS, SHOWING THE LTTE THAT TALKING IS BETTER THAN FIGHTING, AND, IF THE TALKS BREAK DOWN AND CONFLICT RESUMES, THE NAVY COULD PUT A SERIOUS DENT IN TERRORIST SUPPLY EFFORTS. TO THOSE ENDS, THE COUNTRY TEAM STRONGLY SUPPORTS THE PROVISION OF A 210' EDA CUTTER TO THE SL NAVY.

6. (U) BELOW, WE SEEK TO ADDRESS THE QUESTIONS THAT NEED ANSWERING PRIOR TO THE PROCESSING OF A LETTER OF OFFER AND ACCEPTANCE (LOA).

A. (C) COUNTRY REQUIREMENTS. THE SRI LANKA NAVY IS SHIFTING FROM A STRATEGY OF CLOSE-IN (4 TO 12 NAUTICAL MILES) TO LITTORAL WATERS (25 - 27NM) DEFENSE AGAINST LTTE SMUGGLING EFFORTS BECAUSE OF THE RELAXATION OF MARITIME RESTRICTIONS MENTIONED ABOVE. THIS CHANGE IN NATIONAL STRATEGY AND NAVAL DOCTRINE IS NOT WELL SUPPORTED BY THE CURRENT FLEET. THE ADDITION OF SEVERAL VESSELS OF MEDIUM ENDURANCE FOR LONGER AND DEEPER PATROLLING, SUCH AS THE 210' FORMER-USCG CUTTERS, WOULD CONTRIBUTE IMMENSELY TO THE SRI LANKA NAVY'S ABILITY TO PERFORM THIS VITAL NATIONAL FUNCTION. THIS NATION'S NAVY ONLY HAS FOUR, OLDER VESSELS OF MIXED NATIONAL ORIGIN TO ACCOMPLISH THIS MISSION. FAILURE TO ASSIST SRI LANKA'S NAVY IN THE PROCUREMENT OF SUITABLE VESSELS IN SUFFICIENT QUALITIES COULD RESULT IN THE LTTE'S SEA

TIGER WING GAINING THE UPPER HAND IN THE 'LOGISTICS WAR.' CONTINUED SUCCESS BY THE LTTE AT SEA WOULD ALSO SET AN EXAMPLE FOR OTHER GROUPS TO COPY-CAT IN THEIR ATTACKS AGAINST THE US. AFTER AN END TO LOCAL HOSTILITIES, THE SRI LANKA NAVY COULD USE THE VESSEL FOR MARITIME PATROLLING IN THE COUNTER-DRUGS ROLE, COMBAT HUMAN TRAFFICKING, COUNTER PIRACY AND CONDUCT SEARCH AND RESCUE OPERATIONS IN THE NOW LARGELY UNPATROLLED SOUTHERN INDIAN OCEAN.

1B. (C) ABILITY TO USE EFFECTIVELY. THE COUNTRY TEAM BELIEVES THE SRI LANKA NAVY HAS THE ABILITY TO USE A MEDIUM ENDURANCE CUTTER IN THE WAR AGAINST THE LTTE, A DEPARTMENT OF STATE-DESIGNATED FOREIGN TERRORIST ORGANIZATION, AND THAT THIS IS IN THE USG INTEREST. THE NATION'S MARITIME SERVICE HAS OVER 50 YEARS EXPERIENCE IN LITTORAL OPERATIONS COUNTERING SMUGGLERS AND TERRORISTS. THE NAVY ALREADY OPERATES A SIMILARLY SIZED, OFFSHORE PATROL VESSEL (OPV) OF INDIAN-ORIGIN. SRI LANKAN NAVAL OFFICERS ATTEND PROFESSIONAL MILITARY EDUCATION COURSES IN THE UNITED STATES RANGING FROM THE VERY PRACTICAL CIC OFFICERS COURSE TO THE MORE THEORETICAL SENIOR COMMAND COURSE. FINALLY, THE GOVERNMENT OF SRI LANKA PLANS TO BECOME MORE INVOLVED IN GLOBAL PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS WHERE MARITIME RESOURCES, SUCH AS US-PROVIDED MEDIUM ENDURANCE CUTTERS, COULD PROVIDE VALUABLE SYNERGIES WITH THE UNITED STATES NAVY AND COAST GUARD AS WELL AS OTHER ALLIED FLEETS.

1C. (C) ITEM LOCATION AND TRANSPORTATION. THE SRI LANKA NAVY INITIALLY PLANS TO BASE ANY MAJOR US ACQUISITION AT THE PORT OF COLOMBO WITH DUTY IN THE INDIAN OCEAN BASIN AND THE PALK STRAITS. THIS IS FOR TWO MAJOR REASONS. FIRST, THE PORT OF COLOMBO HAS THE NATION'S MAJOR HARBOR WITH ASSOCIATED SUPPORT FACILITIES, SECOND, TO PROTECT THE VESSEL FROM POSSIBLE SEA TIGER ATTACK. THE VESSEL WOULD THEN PATROL THE WATERS OF THE INDIAN OCEAN BASIN FROM AMBANTOTA IN THE SOUTH TO THE JAFFNA PENINSULA IN THE NORTH. A VESSEL AS LARGE AS A 210' MEDIUM ENDURANCE CUTTER COULD BE SAILED FROM ITS REFURBISHMENT SITE IN THE US TO SRI LANKA AFTER A PERIOD OF CREW TRAINING. THE SRI LANKA NAVY HAS EXPERIENCE IN MOVING SHIPS FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM TO THE ISLAND NATION.

1D. (C) ABILITY TO PAY. IN THE PAST WE HAVE REPORTED THAT SRI LANKA, AND ITS NAVY, HAS BEEN CASH STRAPPED BECAUSE OF BUDGETARY CONSTRAINTS IMPOSED BY THE GSL AS IT STRUGGLES TO MEET INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND TARGETS. THE SRI LANKA DEFENSE BUDGET, NEVERTHELESS, IS OVER UNITED STATES DOLLARS (USD) 500 MILLION WITH ALMOST USD 100 MILLION OF THAT FOR DEFENSE PROCUREMENT, AND THE PRIME MINISTER HAS RECENTLY DIRECTED THE SERVICE CHIEFS TO LOOK SPECIFICALLY AT US EQUIPMENT. WHILE THE SRI LANKA NAVY'S INITIAL PROCUREMENT BUDGET FOR FY2002 WAS APPROXIMATELY USD 30 MILLION, A SUPPLEMENTAL COULD BE GIVEN AT THE DIRECTION OF THE GOVERNMENT. THE PURCHASE OF A MEDIUM ENDURANCE CUTTER COULD BE SPREAD OVER TWO FISCAL YEARS.

1E. (C) ABILITY TO ABSORB INTO THE FORCE STRUCTURE. THE SRI LANKA NAVY IS PLANNING TO CHANGE ITS FORCE STRUCTURE OVER THE NEXT DECADE FROM A PURELY CLOSE-IN FORCE RELIANT UPON FAST ATTACK CRAFT AND PATROL CRAFT TO A LITTORAL FORCE BASED ON OPVS AND POSSIBLY CORVETTES/CUTTERS. THE FLEET'S FOCUS WILL SHIFT AS WELL FROM CONCENTRATING EXCLUSIVELY ON SMALLER SMUGGLERS' CRAFT TO 'MOTHER SHIPS.' WHILE THERE WILL CERTAINLY BE SOME 'TEETHING PAINS' WITH THE ACQUISITION OF MEDIUM ENDURANCE CUTTERS BY THE SRI LANKA NAVY, THE SYSTEM(S) SHOULD EVENTUALLY ENTER SERVICE. THE PURCHASE OF AN INDIAN OPV WENT EXTREMELY SMOOTHLY FROM AN OPERATIONAL POINT OF VIEW. FINALLY, THE MAINTENANCE COST ESTIMATES PROVIDED BY THE USCG ARE BASED MAINLY ON THREE ITEMS, LABOR (MUCH CHEAPER IN SRI LANKA THAN IN THE US), FUEL (CURRENTLY AT A SIMILAR PRICE AS PAID BY THE USCG) AND SPARES (THE ONLY FIXED PRICE THAT CANNOT BE ADJUSTED BY THE GSL). WITH THESE COSTS IN MIND, COUNTRY TEAM BELIEVES THAT SRI LANKA CAN AFFORD TO MAINTAIN THE VESSEL.

1F. (C) MPP SUPPORT. PROVIDING THE SRI LANKA NAVY WITH VESSELS OF THE MEDIUM ENDURANCE CUTTER CLASS SIZE SUPPORTS AMEMBASSY COLOMBO'S MPP. REGIONAL SECURITY AND COUNTER-TERRORISM ARE TWO FUNDAMENTAL AREAS OF THE MISSION'S PLAN FOR SRI LANKA. BY IMPROVING THE NAVY'S ABILITY TO INTERDICT LTTE SUPPLIES, THE USG WILL HELP TO BRING THIS TERRORIST ORGANIZATION TO HEEL.

1G. (SBU) HUMAN RIGHTS. THE SRI LANKA MILITARY HAS HAD AN IMPROVING HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD WHILE THE LTTE HAS A CONSISTENTLY POOR RECORD. ASSISTING THE GSL TO BRING

AND KEEP THE LTTE AT THE NEGOTIATION TABLE AND IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS CAN ONLY HELP IMPROVE THE HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD OF BOTH SIDES. THE SRI LANKA NAVY'S SEA-GOING UNITS HAVE A SOLID HR RECORD WITH FEW VERIFIABLE INCIDENTS IN THE LAST THREE YEARS.

17. (C) FINAL COMMENTS: PROVISION OF THE CUTTER FULLY SUPPORTS OUR 2003 MPP AND THE OVERALL US OBJECTIVES OF COMBATING TERRORISM AND ILLICIT TRAFFIC IN DRUGS AND HUMANS. IT FURTHER INCREASES US INFLUENCE WITH THE SL MILITARY AND REWARDS A FRANKLY PRO-US GOVERNMENT THAT SEEKS INCREASINGLY CLOSE US-SL MIL-TO-MIL RELATIONS.

18. (U) POINT OF CONTACT IS LT COL RICH GIRVEN, DEFENSE AND ARMY ATTACHE, CHIEF OF THE OFFICE OF DEFENSE COOPERATION. TELEPHONE AT: 94 (COUNTRY CODE) - 1 (CITY CODE) - 448007, EXT.: 2442/2; OR, EMAIL AT: DIGIRRS@NOTES.DAWN.DIA.SMIL.MIL (CLASSIFIED) OR DATT@ITMIN.COM (UNCLASSIFIED).

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